

# *anchorage anarchy*

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## What's the matter with kids today?

What's a parent to do? PSAs broadcast on radio throughout the day tell listeners that every kid is constantly on the verge of smoking dope and thus ruining their life. Parents are encouraged to scrutinize their kids' internet use since they are in imminent danger of abduction by a sexual predator or intimidation by a cyberbully. The medical and political authorities warn us about the dangers of HIV, occasional exposure to sidestream tobacco smoke, riding a bike without a helmet, contaminated lettuce, and now the scourge of unsafe bridges. Newspapers alert us to the plethora of dangers we need to worry about with headlines like "Stricter ATV regulations needed to protect kids, some say;" or "Sand holes can swallow a person." News media reports lead people to believe that gang violence is rampant, even in a relative

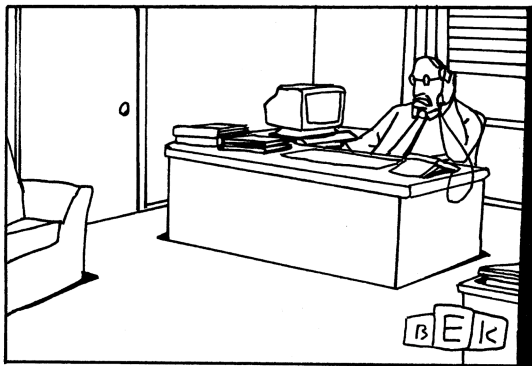
backwater like Anchorage. And then there are "foreign" terrorists and bird flu. It's simply amazing that any kid in america makes it through to adulthood these days.

Apparently there are people who believe this crap, since overbearing parenting is all the rage. Whatever the problems associated with growing up in the sixties and seventies, it was heaven compared to what kids have to go through with modern childrearing. Although our parents kept us on a relatively short leash, at least we had some breathing space, some areas of our lives that were outside the scope of parental supervision and snooping. Not so much for the children of today.

Modern parents seem to feel the need to keep their children under constant surveillance. When the kids are small, they don't let them go play on the streets with just anyone, but prefer to set up play dates through other parents. If they get a minor injury at their day care center, the parents want a full scale government inquiry. As they grow up, they buy them cellphones and require them to check in throughout the day so they can be interrogated and harangued. They vet their children's friends, and they expect their kids to see mommy and daddy as friends they should confide in. They pry into their internet activity and monitor their phone usage. They obsess about whether their kids are having sex and try to schedule their own days in such a way that their kids are never unsupervised when they



are not at school. They can't seem to just leave their kids alone and trust them to make good choices, even for a moment. This may make the parents feel like they are raising kids responsibly, but it interferes with the kids' ability to develop a sense of self-responsibility and independence. Small wonder so many grown children still live at home.



*"I would have gotten that report to you sooner, but I wasn't held enough as a child."*

What happened to the people I grew up with? The ones who smoked dope, drank, had sex, got home before their parents each day and somehow still managed to have jobs, go to college, live on their own? The ones who resented their parents' attempts to control their lives? The ones who rebelled and struck out on their own and somehow succeeded? Apparently they have turned into *their* parents on steroids.

### Father and Mother Know Best

They believe their parenting style is justified because of the alleged dangers of the world, which they perceive to be much worse than those they encountered growing up. But this is all nonsense. Few children are abducted by strangers for sexual purposes or otherwise. Sexual predation remains largely a family affair, and is likely much rarer than we are led to believe by the hysterics on television and

elsewhere in the mass media. Many kids smoke pot, and are none the worse for it, while marijuana use is surely no more prevalent now than it was decades ago when today's parents were growing up. HIV is uncommon and difficult to transmit, the dangers of sidestream tobacco smoke are ridiculously overblown, and riding a bike sans helmet is no more dangerous than it was when us old folks grew up, and, somehow, survived to talk about it. And, miraculously, we haven't all been wiped out yet by plane bombings, a flu pandemic, or *E. coli* on our veggies.

### Risky Business

Part of the problem is a poor understanding of risk. This is nothing new. Early in the HIV outbreak people were told "everybody" was at risk of getting AIDS. This was simply a lie. If one did not have sex, share needles, or receive blood products, one was in fact at no risk of acquiring HIV. And if one were prudent in their sexual practices, the risk approached zero. But people in general simply bought the authorities' and AIDS activists' lies about HIV and abandoned their reason and skepticism. People seemed unable or unwilling to evaluate their own risk and simply bought the line being sold by the experts.

The same goes for most of the other things people fear so much. The majority of those who smoke pot do so safely and in a way that doesn't interfere with their lives. Kids are online all the time and rarely get raped as a result. Sidestream smoke is simply an annoyance to most. And riding a bike without a helmet puts the rider at only a small risk of brain injury. But data and statistics are presented in ways that breed fear and people's minds seemingly shut down when the authorities make their proclamations about what is safe and unsafe. All the worst case

scenarios are presented, while the data necessary to evaluate the real risks of whatever is being demonized are either omitted or lied about.

For instance, we all know that most cases of lung cancer occur in tobacco smokers. However, it is not uncommon for people to be surprised when I tell them that it is also true that most smokers do not get lung cancer; in fact only about 15% of smokers will.

these days, sidestream smoke is highly unlikely to do any serious damage to most people exposed to it. While the “experts” claim there is no safe level of smoke exposure, this is true only in the sense that there is no safe way to drive, cross the street, or have sex, since taking part in any of these activities can, in some circumstances, result in injury or death. Nothing is risk-free, and, if the standards applied to assessing the risks of breathing environmental tobacco smoke are applied to other human activities, one could say there is no safe level of exposure to living life itself.

TOO MANY LAWYERS SPOIL THE BROTH



Similarly, while the only way to meet an online predator is to be online, only a tiny percentage of those on line are sexually victimized. If you are riding a bike and fall a certain way, while pedaling at a certain speed you can sustain a brain injury, but these accidents are uncommon and the “need” for helmets greatly exaggerated; according to CDC, there are only 6300 hospital admissions for traumatic brain injuries related to bicycling in the entire country (of 300,000,000 people) each year. And perhaps the biggest bugaboo

### Figures Don’t Lie, but Liars Figure

One needs only to read the data presented in the articles with the sensational headlines I cited above to see how manipulative writers can be in making their case about supposed hazards. In the story about ATVs, statistics were presented which showed that two children were killed in ATV mishaps in Washington this year and 18 kids under 16 were killed between 1982 and 2005. The writer fails to point out there are more than a million people under 16 in the state, thus neglecting to provide a context in which to evaluate the real risks involved. Less than .0002% of kids in Washington die of ATV-related injuries each year, but the writer believes this “threat” requires more government action to “protect kids.”

But the threat of ATVs pales beside that of collapsing sand holes, which have resulted in the deaths of 31 children and young adults since 1985. One finds, when reading below the sensational sub-head, however, that this is 31 people in the united states, united kingdom, australia, and new zealand. But the fact that the number of kids killed at the beach is not zero, even though it is close to that number,

just isn't good enough. Parents are encouraged to keep their kids from digging deep holes in the sand and lifeguards on Martha's Vineyard are expected to order kids (and adults!!) out of sand holes and fill them back in. Thank god someone is looking out for our children.

### **I'm From the Government and I'm Here to Help You**

So, in a world where dangers are lied about and exaggerated and people have come to expect that someone else, usually the government, will analyze threats and provide them with protection therefrom, it is no surprise that not only are children's lives increasingly micromanaged and hemmed in by their parents, but the government is taking on more and more power to regulate the details of daily life. From curfews to raised drinking ages to statutory "rape" laws, over the years the government has become even more intrusive in its attempts to control the lives of young people than it is in its supervision of the rest of us.

People in general are gullible and trust in the authorities, because they would rather not have to think for themselves. They believe that "safety" is the most important thing in the lives of their children, but fail to use any critical thinking in figuring out what is really safe and what unsafe. Absolute safety is unattainable and all one can realistically hope to do is decrease the risk of harm from activities they participate in.

But that is not what happens. People continue to readily engage in many activities that put them at real risk, but are overly concerned about dangers that are unlikely to affect them. So millions upon millions eat themselves into diabetes and heart disease, and then support laws that require other people to stop smoking or wear helmets. Although 4000

or so americans have been killed in the last several years in the military's campaign of slaughter in iraq and afghanistan, there are no calls to abolish the military (except from some of the few anarchists around), but there are those who believe we are failing to exercise good judgment if we don't intervene when kids play at the beach because one dies every year or so in a freak accident. People seem to have lost their perspective.

Everyone should be free to express their safety concerns and even, annoying as it may be, lecture others about their private behavior. After all, those of us who are not so credulous and frightened can ignore the nannies or tell them to fuck off. But when it comes to kids, attempts at persuasion take a back seat to force and compulsion. If parents are unwilling or unable to force their kids to live lives restricted by endless protections, they are more than willing to make the state the enforcer. They are happy to have the state make anything from walking the streets at night to having a beer at 18 to smoking a joint to having sex with someone of the "wrong" age a violation of some law or other that justifies harassment, arrest, or even imprisonment of young people.

An over-concern with ever-present dangers, real or perceived, to our safety has created a sort of paranoia among all too many people. Politicians and bureaucrats, with their continuous speechifying about threats to the "homeland" and fake epidemics of injury and illness, both promote fear and take advantage of it to increase their power. Although adults have the ability to escape some of this increasingly intrusive government bullying, younger people are forced to live more and more constrained lives. That's what's wrong with kids today: too damn much meddling from family and government.

# Alaska Notes



## What's wrong with this picture?

I was recently required to submit to fingerprinting and a criminal background check in order to continue in my job as a nurse at a hospital in Anchorage. And I will have to submit to the same scrutiny every five years. Our guardians in the state legislature have decided that health care workers are all criminals and a danger to our patients until proven otherwise. And this in a state where many state politicians and the entire delegation to the federal legislature, who are indignant that anyone has the audacity to suggest they are less than saintly, have been accused of corruption in recent days. The real criminals cry about being investigated based on hard evidence, while they require those of us trying to make an honest living to prove we are no threat to those we care for, despite the fact that there are no grounds for suspicion.

## Pigs at the Trough

But alaskan voters continue to return these crooks to office because they bring home the

bacon. In 2005, Alaska was the state that received the largest amount of earmarked federal money per capita, to the tune of \$1064 per resident. Although much of the money directed to the state through these earmarks ends up in the pockets of bureaucrats and favored corporate and "non-profit" executives, enough of it ends up in the general economy that most state residents believe they are benefiting personally from this redistribution of stolen goods. People feel absolutely entitled to this windfall, and fear the day when the current crop of politicians leave office, thereby taking alaskans politicians out of the most senior ranks in Washington, which would likely result in the end of the gravy train. So, unless Young and Stevens are forced out of office by criminal charges, their ongoing reelection is virtually assured.



## State of War

\$183,000,000 of the \$705,000,000 that alaska's congressional delegation extorted from taxpayers in the form of earmarks went to the military. And further strengthening the state's status as a key player in the military's killing machine, the air force base in Anchorage is acquiring 40 new fighter jets. Warmonger senator Ted Stevens crows about how much money, \$800,000,000 a year, the air force base already brings to alaska's economy, and how many new jobs will be created by construction related to the latest engines of death and destruction to be stationed there. It doesn't bother Ted that so much of the federal "free" money he helps brings in to the state is tied to making war on others. And it appears not to matter to most other alaskans either. If the constant stream of "military appreciation"

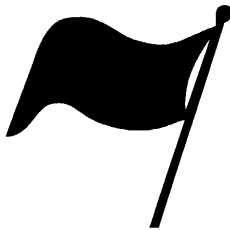


"We'll miss them when they're gone."

sales and events is any indication, most people here seem quite content with the covenant their politicians have made with the masters of war.

## The New/Old Prohibition

Not content with banning smoking in all "public" facilities in Anchorage, including bars, the puritans have set their sights on alcohol once again. Since the drinking establishments in Anchorage close at 2:00 AM, but those in the borough 40 or so miles north are open till 5:00, local busybodies are afraid that someone might leave a bar in Anchorage and drive to the valley to continue partying for a couple more hours. So, on the off chance that someone might make the trip in the early morning with an alcohol level higher than that prescribed by the authorities, the *Anchorage Daily News* and some others are urging legislation to close valley bars at 2:00 or 2:30. In the opinion of the *ADN*'s editorial writer, these would be "more civilized times." If this is true, perhaps the primitivists have a point after all about the evils of civilization.

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# I'm From the Government—I'm Here to Heal You

A couple of months ago, I was sitting in a webinar about coding for outpatient medical and nursing procedures billed to Medicare. As I was led through the maze of arcane formulas and requirements, I got to thinking about how much Medicare has inflated the costs of health care. Here I was, being paid \$40 an hour, as were seven or eight of my nurse colleagues, to listen to consultants (who were surely getting paid way more than I), quote from other consultants (more \$\$\$) about how to fill out papers to maximize the amount of reimbursement the hospital I work for can receive from Medicare. And this is all because the people who work for Medicare (\$\$\$) issue coding guidelines that are vague and open to interpretation, so that bills are constantly bounced back to providers for more processing (\$\$\$) to justify or explain the charges so they can be rebilled. What a ridiculously expensive and inefficient process.



*"As you can see, we've transferred your husband from intensive to casual care."*

But this experience served to demonstrate to me once again that though there are clearly problems in the way american health care is

consumed, provided, and paid for, advocates of increased government involvement are taking the wrong approach. The state is already a key player in regulating and financing the system and has only served to exacerbate the few problems which it did not create or facilitate in the first place.

The feds and lower levels of government license providers, thus granting monopoly status to doctors, nurse, therapists, and so on. They control the number of training programs by picking and choosing which ones can receive government-provided scholarships and grants. They legislate or otherwise dictate which drugs can be used, and by whom, by allowing or prohibiting the sale and use of specific drugs and granting health professional the exclusive right to write prescriptions for most medicines. These controls by the state are the basic reason why the pool of providers is small, and, as in any other oligopoly situation, the product is expensive and often of lesser quality than one would hope.

In addition to this infrastructure of control, the government exerts its influence on the health care system in many other, and equally destructive, ways, but perhaps the primary mechanism through which the feds influence, and damage, the provision of medical services in the united states, is Medicare.

## Social Insecurity

Medicare was created as part of the social security system to provide health insurance for old people. It has never worked well and gets worse and worse with time. It is riddled with restrictive rules that often make it hard for old people to get adequate primary care. This leads to people getting treatment later in the

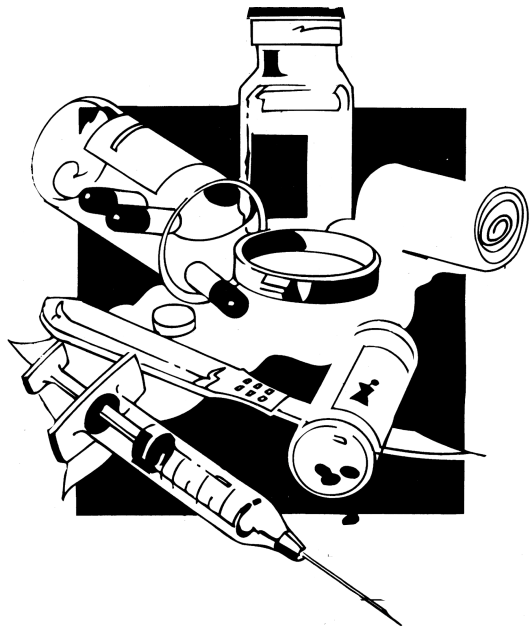
course of an illness, which results in more hardship to the patient, more likelihood of a bad outcome, and more expensive treatment than would otherwise have been needed.

The reason that primary care is becoming less available for Medicare patients is that Medicare reimbursement is inadequate to cover the costs of providing this care. When providers agree to accept Medicare, they are prohibited from billing for or accepting payment for covered services other than that provided by the government, and thus have no way of making caring for Medicare patients affordable. So, as reimbursement to providers lags further and further behind costs, fewer and fewer doctors or other practitioners will agree to take on new Medicare patients. It is a money-losing proposition and leads those who do care for Medicare patient to charge their other patients more than they otherwise would in order to make ends meet, increasing the costs to insurers and those they insure. Not only are non-Medicare patients subsidizing Medicare recipients with the taxes they are forced to pay, but they are also subsidizing them with their steadily rising insurance premiums.

Then, when those who have been unable to get primary care get ill, they show up in hospital emergency rooms, where costs are significantly higher than those in a doctor's office. And, being older, these people tend to have multiple health problems, and commonly end up being hospitalized, again, a more expensive setting in which to receive treatment. Besides being costly, treatment in a hospital exposes patients, especially old ones, to additional health risks. Medicare breeds expensive, inefficient health care, while masquerading as the guardian of old peoples' health.

### The Pharmacy Benefit

The more the politicians try to manipulate and improve Medicare, the worse they make it. Under the guise of providing beneficiaries with less expensive access to prescription medicines, the new Medicare Part D serves only to confuse those it allegedly helps and aggrandize the companies who provide pharmacy services. It provides partial payment for prescriptions up to a total of \$2400 worth of drugs per year, then provides no coverage for additional prescriptions up to \$3850 in a year (the so-called donut hole), and then starts paying again, covering most of any costs above \$3850 annually.



This is progress? Recipients are required to choose between a large number of pharmacy service providers, who offer different formularies and have different charges for medications. They are allowed to choose only from among these government-authorized



companies and cannot shop where they like. Additionally this program provides inadequate coverage for many poor old people and results in people not taking their medications, or taking partial, and inadequate, doses of them. Basically, Part D takes taxpayers' stolen money, redistributes it among various favored pharmacies, and leaves many ill old people inadequately treated. But this is not so different from how Medicare has operated all along.



### The JCAHO Scam

As noted above, besides providing lousy care for old people, Medicare also drives up the costs of care for everyone else. In addition to soaking insured patients to subsidize the primary care of those on Medicare, it has created a system of oversight of hospitals that is riddled with corruption and very expensive, but which does little to improve care.

Medicare authorizes the Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) to "certify" that hospitals and other providers of health services are eligible to receive reimbursement from Medicare. Since upwards of 40% of a typical hospital's revenue comes from Medicare and Medicaid (another government health insurance plan), both of which require JCAHO certification, virtually all large hospitals in the country participate in this scheme. Purportedly, JCAHO monitors hospitals for the quality and safety of patient care, but many of its rules are arbitrary and have nothing to do with either. When they inspect a hospital they

spend some time checking to see if processes are in place to minimize harm to patients and maximize safe and effective care, but they also spend a significant amount of time and effort on nonsense such as checking that employees can parrot the hospital's mission statement, seeing that nothing is stored under sinks, and making sure that patient food and staff food is kept in separate refrigerators (I kid you not). In addition they survey records with a fine tooth comb, searching for variations from their prescribed requirements for documentation, many of which, like much of the rest of JCAHO's standards, have nothing to do with taking care of people, but instead cause staff to spend lots of time "charting to standard" rather than actually caring for sick people

This whole certification charade wastes more than time, however. Like the coding system I discussed earlier, JCAHO inspections create jobs for many parasites. First are the JCAHO staff, including the inspectors, who add nothing to the care of patients, but all draw salaries for their trouble. Then there are the



consultants hired by the hospitals to interpret the ever-changing JCAHO rules and help them create an idyllic, but phony, picture of how the hospital operates for the benefit of the inspectors. Then there is the money wasted on procedures and charting mandated by JCAHO

but having nothing to do with curing or caring for ill people. And, not unlike the federal government and the industries it regulates and/or funds, people switch back and forth between jobs at JCAHO, the hospitals, and the consultancies, creating fertile ground for corruption. The whole structure is a scam designed to maintain bureaucratic control of health care provision and transfer wealth into the pockets of insiders under the guise of assuring and improving health care.

### Health Care Reform

Given how badly the government manages the parts of the health care system it already controls, it surprises me to hear critics of the often sorry state of american health care advocate further political intervention as the way to reform the system. One hears stories about how wonderful medical care is in canada or the united kingdom, and some form of universal "single-payer" (read state-run) health care is supported by many politicians, businesspeople, and even unions. It makes sense for politicians to support such proposals, since it would increase their power, and



"You're in a hospital, Nurse Hill. If you collapse from exhaustion, the emergency room is just down the hall."

businesses like it since they could save money by no longer having to subsidize insurance for employees.

Unions and other working people, however, would do well to be careful what they ask for. Besides exacerbating such problems as mismanagement of resources and bureaucratic corruption, a medical system more completely controlled by the state will allow consumers much less latitude in managing their own use of providers, medications, and institutions.

Most working americans have employer-subsidized private health plans, and a frequent complaint I hear from my co-workers in my role as a union activist is that they don't have enough choice in what providers they can see, what hospitals they can utilize, and what drugs they can purchase on their insurance plans. They don't seem to realize that they will have even fewer choices if the united states goes the route of canada or britain. These countries have much tighter rules than those of american private insurance plans, and appeals are at least as difficult. In addition, waiting periods for procedures easily available to the insured in the US are months and years long in countries



"But socialized medicine may pave the way for a *really* major breakthrough - socialized liquor."

with single-payer or nationalized health care. Is this what these folks really want?

### **Making Matters Worse**

The american health care system as it currently exists is largely a creature of government. The problems with access and expense that those advocating reform show such concern about are directly related to rules and regulations forced on providers and customers by the state as it strives to control people's lives and put our money into the pockets of favored clients, like the bureaucrats and drug company executives and stockholders. Americans will face a rude awakening if they believe that expanding the role of the state in supervising and funding health care will do anything but increase costs, graft, the lengths of the lines people already wait in when seeking care, and the number of hoops they have to jump through to get procedures and medicines they want.



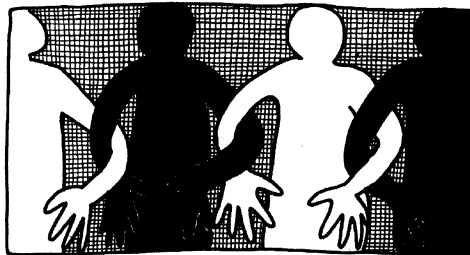
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# War Against the World

The american military remains unable to keep its hands—and arms—to itself. As part of the ongoing occupation of iraq, soldiers slaughter civilians at check points. Around a third of the troops stationed in iraq condone torture (of others, of course). American soldiers can kidnap and kill unarmed iraqis with virtual impunity.

In afghanistan, american forces are known for the reckless disregard of civilian deaths they demonstrate in their bombing campaigns against supposed terrorists. Just this month, a british military commander criticized US special forces for injuring and killing so many non-combatants in helmand, and asked that they be withdrawn from his little fiefdom there.

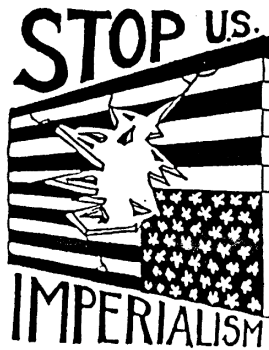
Besides these better known instances of US military action, the united states is conducting a near-secret war in somalia. American forces have bombed somali civilians in support of the invasion by the ethiopian military, and appear to have a continuing presence in the area. Like in iraq and afghanistan, this campaign is justified because of the “terrorist threat.”

While the news media report that most american oppose the war in iraq, there is little evidence that they really care very much. They continue to elect politicians who continue to fund all these wars. And they get very concerned about the deaths and injuries of american military personnel, but have a very high tolerance for the far greater number of

innocents who have been butchered either directly by US forces or as a result of the internal war created by the occupation. In the case of the military intervention in somalia, few even know it is going on, primarily because there are no reports of americans dying there.

The american military is staffed by volunteers. Everyone who is “serving” in iraq, afghanistan, somalia, or wherever else the military has a presence, signed up and are responsible for their situation. On the other hand, the non-combatants who have died as a result of american war-making were people just trying to go about their business unmolested in their own homes and cities before they were murdered.

It seems to me that people described as anti-war are often simply opposed to american soldiers dying, not to american soldiers killing, especially if it is for a “good” cause. We’ll never see the end of war until people get over their nationalist view of “us and them” and come to recognize the value of the lives of individual peaceful people, however different they appear physically, whatever language they speak, and however far away they live.



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